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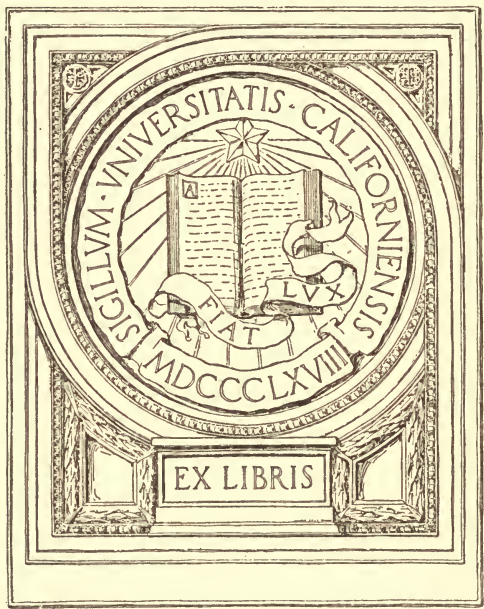
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*THE HERMITAGE
AND LATER POEMS
... BY EDWARD
ROWLAND SILL ...*



GIFT OF
Elisabeth Whitney Putnam



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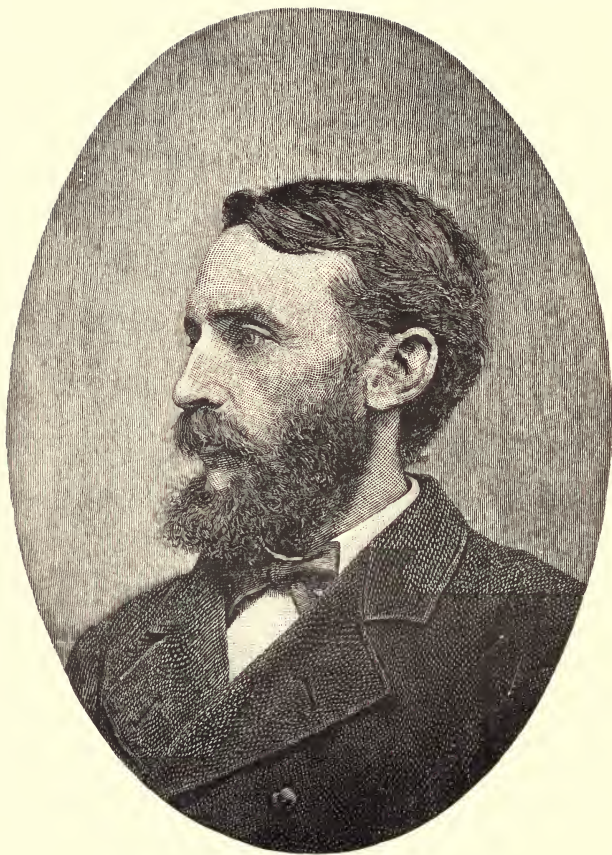
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S. R. Sill

THE HERMITAGE AND
LATER POEMS

BY

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

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THE LETTER.

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL, DIED FEBRUARY
27, 1887.

*I held his letter in my hand,
And even while I read
The lightning flashed across the land
The word that he was dead.*

*How strange it seemed! His living voice
Was speaking from the page
Those courteous phrases, tersely choice,
Light-hearted, witty, sage.*

*I wondered what it was that died!
The man himself was here,
His modesty, his scholar's pride,
His soul serene and clear.*

*These neither death nor time shall dim,
Still this sad thing must be—
Henceforth I may not speak to him,
Though he can speak to me!*

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH.

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THE HERMITAGE.¹

I.



LIFE, — a common, cleanly,
quiet life,
Full of good citizenship and re-
pute,
New, but with promise of prosperity, —
A well-bred, fair, young-gentlemanly
life, —
What business had a girl to bring her
eyes,
And her blonde hair, and her clear, ring-
ing voice,
And break up life, as a bell breaks a
dream?
Had Love Christ's wrath, and did this
life sell doves

¹ California, Bay of San Francisco, 1866.

In the world's temple, that Love scourged
it forth
Beyond the gates? Within, the worship-
ers, —
Without, the waste, and the hill-country,
where
The life, with smarting shoulders and
stung heart,
Unknowing that the hand which scourged
could heal,
Drave forth, blind, cursing, in despair to
die,
Or work its own salvation out in fear.

Old World — old, foolish, wicked World
— farewell !
Since the Time-angel left my soul with
thee,
Thou hast been a hard step-mother unto
me.
Now I at last rebel
Against thy stony eyes and cruel hands.

I will go seek in far-off lands
Some quiet corner, where my years shall
 be
Still as the shadow of a brooding bird
That stirs but with her heart-beats. Far,
 unheard
May wrangle on the noisy human host,
While I will face my Life, that silent
 ghost,
And force it speak what it would have
 with me.

Not of the fair young Earth,
The snow-crowned, sunny-belted globe ;
Not of its skies, nor Twilight's purple
 robe,
Nor pearly dawn ; not of the flowers'
 birth,
And Autumn's forest - funerals ; not of
 storms,
And quiet seas, and clouds' incessant
 forms ;
Not of the sanctuary of the night,

With its solemnities, nor any sight
And pleasant sound of all the friendly
day :

But I am tired of what we call our lives ;
Tired of the endless humming in the
hives, —

Sick of the bitter honey that we eat,
And sick of cursing all the shallow
cheat.

Let me arise, and away
To the land that guards the dying day,
Whose burning tear, the evening-star,
Drops silently to the wave afar ;
The land where summers never cease
Their sunny psalm of light and peace.
Whose moonlight, poured for years un-
told,
Has drifted down in dust of gold ;
Whose morning splendors, fallen in show-
ers,
Leave ceaseless sunrise in the flowers.

There I will choose some eyrie in the
hills,
Where I may build, like a lonely bird,
And catch the whispered music heard
Out of the noise of human ills.

So, I am here at last ;
A purer world, whose feet the old, salt
Past
Washes against, and leaves it fresh and
free
As a new island risen from the sea.

Three dreamy weeks we lay on Ocean's
breast,
Rocked asleep, by gentle winds caressed,
Or crooned with wild wave-lullabies to
rest.
A memory of foam and glassy spray ;
Wave chasing wave, like young sea-beasts
at play ;
Stretches of misty silver 'neath the moon,

And night-airs murmuring many a quiet
tune.

Three long, delicious weeks' monotony
Of sky, and stars, and sea,
Broken midway by one day's tropic
scene
Of giant plants, tangles of luminous
green,
With fiery flowers and purple fruits be-
tween.

I have found a spot for my hermit-
age, —
No dank and sunless cave, —
I come not for a dungeon, nor a cage, —
Not to be Nature's slave,
But, as a weary child,
Unto the mother's faithful arms I flee,
And seek the sunniest footstool at her
knee,
Where I may sit beneath caresses mild,
And hear the sweet old songs that she
will sing to me.

'T is a grassy mountain-nook,
In a gorge, whose foaming brook
Tumbles through from the heights above,
Merrily leaping to the light
From the pine-wood's haunted gloom, —
As a romping child,
Affrighted, from a sombre room
Leaps to the sunshine, laughing with de-
light :
Be this my home, by man's tread unde-
filed.
Here sounds no voice but of the mourn-
ing dove,
Nor harsher footsteps on the sands ap-
pear
Than the sharp, slender hoof-marks of
the deer,
Or where the quail has left a zigzag row
Of lightly printed stars her track to show.

Above me frowns a front of rocky wall,
Deep cloven into ruined pillars tall
And sculptures strange ; bald to its dizzy
edge,

Save where, in some deep crevice of a
ledge
Buttressed by its black shadow hung
below,
A solitary pine has cleft the rock, —
Straight as an arrow, feathered to the tip,
As if a shaft from the moon-huntress' bow
Had struck and grazed the cliff's defiant
lip,
And stood, still stiffly quivering with the
shock.

Beyond the gorge a slope runs half-way
up,
With hollow curve as for a giant's cup,
Brimming with blue pine-shadows : then
in air
The gray rock rises bare,
Its front deep-fluted by the sculptor-
storms
In moulded columns, rounded forms,
As if great organ-pipes were chiseled
there,

Whose anthems are the torrent's roar
 below,
And chanting winds that through the
 pine-tops go.
Here bursts of requiem music sink and
 rise,
When the full moonlight, slowly streaming,
 lies
Like panes of gold on some cathedral
 pave,
While floating mists their silver incense
 wave,
And from on high, through fleecy win-
 dow-bars,
Gaze down the saintly faces of the stars.

 Against the huge trunk of a storm-
 snapped tree,
(Whose hollow, ready-hewn by long de-
 cay,
Above, a chimney, lined with slate and
 clay,
Below, a broad arched fireplace makes
 for me,)

I've built of saplings and long limbs a
hut.

The roof with lacing boughs is tightly
shut,

Thatched with thick-spreading palms of
pine,

And tangled over by a wandering vine,

Uprooted from the woods close by,

Whose clasping tendrils climb and twine,

Waving their little hands on high,

As if they loved to deck this nest of mine.

Within, by smooth white stones from the
brook's beach

My rooms are separated, each from each.

On yonder island-rock my table's spread,

Brook-ringed, that no stray, fasting ant
may come

To make himself with my wild fare at
home.

Here will I live, and here my life shall
be

Serene, still, rooted steadfastly,

Yet pointing skyward, and its motions
 keep
A rhythmic balance, as that cedar tall,
Whose straight shaft rises from the chasm
 there,
Through the blue, hollow air,
And, measuring the dizzy deep,
Leans its long shadow on the rock's gray
 wall.

Through the sharp gap of the gorge
 below,
From my mountains' feet the gaze may go
Over a stretch of fields, broad-sunned,
Then glance beyond,
Across the beautiful bay,
To that dim ridge, a score of miles away,
Lifting its clear-cut outline high,
Azure with distance on the azure sky,
Whose flocks of white clouds brooding on
 its crests
Have winged from ocean to their piny
 nests.

Beyond the bright blue water's further
rim,
Where waves seem ripples on its far-off
brim,
The rich young city lies,
Diminished to an ant-hill's size.
I trace its steep streets, ribbing all the hill
Like narrow bands of steel,
Binding the city on the shifting sand :
Thick-pressed between them stand
Broad piles of buildings, pricked through
here and there
By a sharp steeple ; and above, the air
Murky with smoke and dust, that seem to
show
The bright sky saddened by the sin be-
low.

The voice of my wild brook is marvel-
ous ;
Leaning above it from a jutting rock
To watch the image of my face, that forms

And breaks, and forms again (as the
image of God

Is broken and re-gathered in a soul),
I listen to the chords that sink and swell
From many a little fall and babbling run.
That hollow gurgle is the deepest bass ;
Over the pebbles gush contralto tones,
While shriller trebles tinkle merrily,
Running, like some enchanted - fingered
flute,
Endless chromatics.

Now it is the hum
And roar of distant streets; the rush of
winds
Through far-off forests : now the noise of
rain
Drumming the roof ; the hiss of ocean-
foam :
Now the swift ripple of piano-keys
In mad mazurkas, danced by laughing
girls.

So, night and day, the hurrying brook
goes on ;

Sometimes in noisy glee, sometimes far
down,
Silent along the bottom of the gorge,
Like a deep passion hidden in the soul,
That chafes in secret hunger for its sea :
Yet not so still but that heaven finds its
course ;
And not so hid but that the yearning
night
Broods over it, and feeds it with her stars.

When earth has Eden spots like this for
man,
Why will he drag his life where lashing
storms
Whip him indoors, the petulant weather's
slave ?
There he is but a helpless, naked snail,
Except he wear his house close at his
back.
Here the wide air builds him his palace
walls, —

Some little corner of it roofed, for sleep ;
Or he can lie all night, bare to the sky,
And feel updrawn against the breast of
 heaven,
Letting his thoughts stretch out among
 the stars,
As the antennæ of an insect grope
Blindly for food, or as the ivy's shoots
Clamber from cope and tower to find the
 light,
And drink the electric pulses of the sun.

As from that sun we draw the coarser
 fire
That swells the veins, and builds the brain
 and bone,
So from each star a finer influence streams,
Kindling within the mortal chrysalis
The first faint thrills of its new life to
 come.

Here is no niggard gap of sky above,
With murk and mist below, but all sides
 clear, —

Not an inch bated from the full-swung
dome ;
Each constellation to the horizon's rim
Keen-glittering, as if one only need
Walk to the edge there, spread his wings,
and float,
The dark earth spurned behind, into the
blue.

I love thee, thou brown, homely, dear
old Earth !
Those fairer planets whither fate may
lead,
Whatever marvel be their bulk or speed,
Ringed with what splendor, belted round
with fire,
In glory of perpetual moons arrayed,
Can ne'er give back the glow and fresh
desire
Of youth in that old home where man had
birth,
Whose paths he trod through wholesome
light and shade.

Out of their silver radiance to thy dim
And clouded orb his eye will turn,
As an old man looks back to where he
 played
About his father's hearth, and finds for
 him
No splendor like the fires which there did
 burn.

See: I am come to live alone with thee.
Thou hast had many a one, grown old and
 worn,
Come to thee weary and forlorn,
Bent with the weight of human vanity.
But I come with my life almost untried,
In thy perpetual presence to abide.
Teach me thy wisdom ; let me learn the
 flowers,
And know the rocks and trees,
And touch the springs of all thy hidden
 powers.
Let the still gloom of thy rock-fastnesses
Fall deep upon my spirit, till the voice

Of brooks become familiar, and my heart
 rejoice
With joy of birds and winds ; and all the
 hours,
Unmaddened by the babble of vain men,
Bring thy most inner converse to my ken.
So shall it be, that, when I stand
On that next planet's ruddy-shimmering
 strand,
I shall not seem a pert and forward child
Seeking to dabble in abstruser lore
With alphabet unlearned, who in disgrace
Returns, upon his primer yet to pore —
But those examiners, all wise and mild,
Shall gently lead me to my place,
As one that faithfully did trace
These simpler earthly records o'er and
 o'er.

Beckoned at sunrise by the surf's white
 hand,
I have strayed down to sit upon the
 beach,

And hear the oratorio of the Sea.
On this steep, crumbling bank, where the
 high tides
Have crunched the earth away, a crooked
 oak —
A hunch-backed dwarf, whose limbs,
 cramped down by gales,
Have twisted stiffening back upon them-
 selves —
Spreads me a little arbor from the sun.

 On the brown, shining beach, all ripple-
 carved,
Gleams now and then a pool ; so smooth
 and clear,
That, though I cannot see the plover
 there
Pacing its farther edge (so much he looks
The color of the sand), yet I can trace
His image hanging in the glassy brine —
Slim legs and rapier-beak — like silver-
 plate
With such a pictured bird clean-etched
 upon it.

Beyond, long curves of little shallow
waves
Creep, tremulous with ripples, to the
shore,
Till the whole bay seems slowly sliding in,
With edge of snow that melts against the
sand.

Above its twinkling blue, where cease-
lessly
The white curve of a slender arm of foam
Is reached along the water, and with-
drawn,
A flock of sea-birds darken into specks ;
Then whiten, as they wheel with sunlit
wings,
Winking and wavering against the sky.

The earth for form, the sea for coloring,
And overhead, fair daughters of the two,
The clouds, whose curves were moulded
on the hills,
Whose tints of pearl and foam the ocean
gave.

O Sea, thou art all-beautiful, but dumb !
Thou hast no utterance articulate
For human ears ; only a restless moan
Of barren tides, that loathe the living
 earth
As alien, striving towards the barren
 moon.
Thou art no longer infinite to man :
Has he not touched thy boundary-shores,
 and now
Laid his electric fetters round thy feet ?
Thy dumb moan saddens me ; let me go
 back
And listen to the silence of the hills.

At last I live alone :
No human judgment-seats are here
Thrust in between man and his Maker's
 throne,
With praise to covet, or with frown to
 fear :
No small, distorted judgments bless, or
 blame ;

Only to Him I own
The inward sense of worth, or flush of
shame.

God made the man alone ;
And all that first grand morning walked
he so.
Then was he strong and wise, till at the
noon,
When tired with joyous wonder he lay
prone
For rest and sleep, God let him know
The subtile sweetness that is bound in
Two.

Man rises best alone :
Upward his thoughts stream, like the
leaping flame,
Whose base is tempest-blown ;
Upward and skyward, since from thence
they came,
And thither they must flow.
But when in twos we go,

The lightnings of the brain weave to and
fro,

Level across the abyss that parts us all ;
If upward, only slantwise, as we scale
Slowly together that night-shrouded wall
Which bounds our reason, lest our reason
fail.

If linked in threes, and fives,
However heavenward the spirit strives,
The lowest stature draws the highest
down, —

The king must keep the level of the
clown.

The grosser matter has the greater power
In all attraction ; every hour
We slide and slip to lower scales,
Till weary aspiration fails,
And that keen fire which might have
pierced the skies,
Is quenched and killed in one another's
eyes.

A child had blown a bubble fair
That floated in the sunny air :
A hundred rainbows danced and swung
Upon its surface, as it hung
In films of changing color rolled,
Crimson, and amethyst, and gold,
With faintest streaks of azure sheen,
And curdling rivulets of green.
“ If so the surface shines,” cried he,
“ What marvel must the centre be ! ”
He caught it — on his empty hands
A drop of turbid water stands !

With men, to help the moments fly,
I tossed the ball of talk on high,
With glancing jest, and random stings,
Grazing the crests of thoughts and things,
In many a shifting ray of speech
That shot swift sparkles, each to each.
I thought, “ Ah, could we pierce below
To inner soul, what depths would show ! ”
In friendships many, loves a few,
I pierced the inner depths, and knew

'T was but the shell that splendor caught :
Within, one sour and selfish thought.

I found a grotto, hidden in the gorge,
Paved by the brook in rare Mosaic work
Of sand, and lucent depths, and shadow-
streaks

Veining the amber of the sun-dyed wave.
Between two mossy masses of gray rock
Lay a clear basin, which, with sun and
shade

Bewitched, a great transparent opal made,
Over whose broken rims the water ran.

Above each rocky side leaned waving
trees

Whose lace of branches wove a restless
roof,

Trailed over by green vines that sifted
down

A dust of sunshine through the chilly
shade.

Leaning against a trunk of oak, rock-
wedged,

Whose withen roots were clenched upon
the stones,
I was a Greek, and caught the sudden
flash
Of a scared Dryad's vanishing robe, and
heard
The laughter, half-suppressed, of hiding
Fauns.
Up the dark stairway of the tumbling
stream
The sun shot through, and struck each
foamy fall
Into a silvery veil of dazzling fire.
Along its shady course, the tossing drops
By some swift sunbeam ever caught, were
lit
To sparkling stars, that fell, and flashed,
and fell,
Incessantly rekindled. Bubble-troops
Came dancing by, to break just at my
feet ;
Lo ! every bubble mirrored the whole
scene —

The streak of blue between the roofing-
boughs,
And on it my own face in miniature
Quaintly distorted, as if some small elf
Peered up at me beneath his glassy dome.

If men but knew the mazes of the brain
And all its crowded pictures, they would
need
No Louvre or Vatican : behind our brows
Intricate galleries are built, whose walls
Are rich with all the splendors of a life.
Each crimson leaf of every autumn walk,
Dewdrops of childhood's mornings, every
scene
From any window where we've chanced
to stand,
Forgotten sunsets, summer afternoons,
Hang fresh in those immortal galleries.
Few ever can unlock them, till great Death
Unrolls our life-long memory as a scroll.
One key is solitude, and silence one,

And one a quiet mind, content to rest
In God's sufficiency, and take His world,
Not dabbling all the Master's work to
death

With our small interference. God is God.

Yet we must give the children leave to
use
Our garden-tools, though they spoil tool
and plant
In learning. So the Master may not
scorn
Our awkwardness, as with these bungling
hands
We try to uproot the ill, and plant with
good
Life's barren soil: the child is learning
use.

Perhaps the angels even are forbid
To laugh at us, or may not care to laugh,
With kind eyes pitying our little hurts.

'Tis ludicrous that man should think he
roams

Freely at will a world planned for his use.
Lo, what a mite he is! Snatched hither
 and yon,
Tossed round the sun, and in its orbit
 flashed
Round other centres, orbits without end ;
His bit of brain too small to even feel
The spinning of the little hailstone, Earth.
So his creeds glibly prate of choice and
 will,
When his whole fate is an invisible speck
Whirled through the orbits of Eternity.

We think that we believe
That human souls shall live, and live,
When trees have rotted into mould,
And all the rocks which these long hills
 enfold
Have crumbled, and beneath new oceans
 lie.
But why — ah, why —
If puny man is not indeed to die,

Watch I with such disdain
That human speck creeping along the
 plain,
And turn with such a careless scorn of
 men
Back to the mountain's brow again,
And feel more pleased that some small,
 fluttering thing
Trusts me and hovers near on fearless
 wing,
Than if the proudest man in all the land
Had offered me in friendliness his hand?

However small the present creature
 man, —
Ridiculous imitation of the gods,
Weak plagiarism on some completer
 world, —
Yet we can boast of that strong race to be.
The savage broke the attraction which
 binds fast
The fibres of the oak, and we to-day

By cunning chemistry can force apart
The elements of the air. That coming
race

Shall loose the bands by which the earth
attracts ;

A drop of occult tincture, a spring touched
Shall outwit gravitation ; men shall float,
Or lift the hills and set them where they
will.

The savage crossed the lake, and we the
sea.

That coming race shall have no bounds
or bars,

But, like the fledgeling eaglet, leave the
nest, —

Our earthly eyrie up among the stars, —
And freely soar, to tread the desolate
moon,

Or mingle with the neighbor folk of Mars.
Yea, if the savage learned by sign and
sound

To bridge the chasm to his fellow's brain,
Till now we flash our whispers round the
globe,

That race shall signal over the abyss
To those bright souls who throng the
outer courts
Of life, impatient who shall greet men
first
And solve the riddles that we die to know.

'T is night : I sit alone among the hills.
There is no sound, except the sleepless
brook,
Whose voice comes faintly from the
depths below
Through the thick darkness, or the som-
bre pines
That slumber, murmuring sometimes in
their dreams.
Hark! on a fitful gust there came the
sound
Of the tide rising yonder on the bay.
It dies again : 't was like the rustling
noise
Of a great army mustering secretly.

There rose an owl's cry, from the woods
below,

Like a lost spirit's. — Now all 's still
again. —

'Tis almost fearful to sit here alone
And feel the deathly silence and the
dark.

I will arise and shout, and hear at least
My own voice answer. — Not an echo
even!

I wish I had not uttered that wild cry ;
It broke with such a shock upon the air,
Whose leaden silence closed up after it,
And seemed to clap together at my ears.
The black depths of these muffled woods
are thronged

With shapes that wait some signal to
swoop out,
And swirl around and madden me with
fear.

I will go climb that bare and rocky height
Into the clearer air.

So, here I breathe ;
That silent darkness smothered me.
Away
Across the bay, the city with its lights
Twinkling against the horizon's dusky line,
Looks a sea-dragon, crawled up on the
shore,
With rings of fire across his rounded
back,
And luminous claws spread out among
the hills.
Above, the glittering heavens. — Magnifi-
cent !
Oh, if a man could be but as a star,
Having his place appointed, here to rise,
And there to set, unchanged by earthly
change,
Content if it can guide some wandering
bark,
Or be a beacon to some home-sick soul !
Those city-lights again : they draw my
gaze

As if some secret human sympathy
Still held my heart down from the lonely
 heaven.

A new-born constellation, setting there
Below the Sickle's ruby-hilted curve,
They gleam — Not so ! No constella-
 tion they ;

I mock the sad, strong stars that never
 fail

In their eternal patience ; from below
Comes that pale glare, like the faint,
 sulphurous flame

Which plays above the ashes of a fire :
So trembles the dull flicker of those
 lamps

Over the burnt-out energies of man.

II.

A month since I last laid my pencil
 down, —

An April, fairer than the Atlantic June,
Whose calendar of perfect days was kept

By daily blossoming of some new flower.
The fields, whose carpets now were silken
 white,
Next week were orange-velvet, next, sea-
 blue.
It was as if some central fire of bloom,
From which in other climes a random
 root
Is now and then shot up, here had burst
 forth
And overflowed the fields, and set the
 land
Aflame with flowers. I watched them
 day by day,
How at the dawn they wake, and open
 wide
Their little petal-windows, how they turn
Their slender necks to follow round the
 sun,
And how the passion they express all day
In burning color, steals forth with the
 dew
All night in odor.

I have wandered much
These weeks, but everywhere a restless
mind
Has dogged me, like the shadow at my
heels.
Sometimes I watched the morning mist
arise,
Like an imprisoned Genie from the stream,
And wished that death would come on me
like dawn,
Drawing the spirit, that white, vaporous
mist,
Up from this noisy, fretted stream of life,
To fall where God will, in his bounteous
showers.
Sometimes I walked at sunset on the edge
Of the steep gorge, and saw my shadow
pace
Along a shadow-wall across the abyss,
And felt that we, with all our phantom
deeds,
Are but far-slanted shadows of some life
That walks between our planet and its
God.

All the long nights — those memory-
haunted nights,
When sleepless conscience would not let
me sleep,
But stung, and stung, and pointed to the
world
Which like a coward I had left behind,
I watched the heavens, where week by
week the moon
Slow swelled its silver bud, blossomed full
gold,
And slowly faded.

Laid the pencil down —
Why not? Are there not books enough?
Is man
A sick child that must be amused by
songs,
Or be made sicker with their foolish noise?

Then illness came: I should have ar-
gued, once,

That the ill body gave me those ill
thoughts ;

But I have learned that spirit, though it be
Subtile, and hard to trace, is mightier
Than matter, and I know the poisoned
mind

Poisoned its shell. Three days of fever-
fire

Burned out my strength, leaving me
scarcely power

To reach the brook's side and my scanty
food.

What would I not have given to hear the
voice

Of some one who would raise my throbb-
ing head

And shade the fevering sun, and cool my
hand

In her moist palms ! But I lay there,
alone.

Blessed be sickness, which cuts down our
pride

And bares our helplessness. I have had
new thoughts.

I think the fever burned away some lies
Which clogged the truthful currents of
the brain.

Am I quite happy here? Have I the
right,

As wholly independent, to scorn men?

What do I owe them — self? Should I
be I,

Born in these hills? A savage rather!
Food,

The sailor-bread? Yes, that took mill
and men:

Yet flesh and fowl are free; but powder
and gun —

What human lives went to the making of
them?

I am dependent as the villager

Who lives by the white wagon's daily
round.

Yea, better feed upon the ox, to which

The knife is mercy after slavery,

Than kill the innocent birds, and trustful
deer

Whose big blue eyes have almost human
pain ;

That's murder !

I scorned books : to those same books
I owe the power to scorn them.

I despised
Men : from themselves I drew the pure
ideal

By which to measure them.

At woman's love
I laughed : but to that love I owe
The hunger for a more abiding love.

Their nestlings in our hearts leave vacant
there

These hollow places, like a lark's round
nest

Left empty in the grass, and filled with
flowers.

What do I here alone ? 'T was not so
strange,

Weary of discords, that I chose to hear
The one, clear, perfect note of solitude ;

But now it plagues the ear, that one shrill
note :

Give me the chords back, even though
some ring false.

Unmarried to the steel, the flint is cold :
Strike one to the other, and they wake in
fire.

A solitary fagot will not burn :
Bring two, and cheerily the flame ascends.
Alone, man is a lifeless stone ; or lies
A charring ember, smouldering into ash.

If the man riding yonder looks a speck,
The town an ant-hill, that is but the
trick

Of our perspective : wisdom merely means
Correction of the angles at the eye.

I hold my hand up, so, before my face, —
It blots ten miles of country, and a town.

This little lying lens, that twists the rays,
So cheats the brain that My house, My
 affairs,
My hunger, or My happiness, My ache,
And My religion, fill immensity !
Yours merely dot the landscape casually.
'T is well God does not measure a man's
 worth
By the image on his neighbor's retina.

I am alone : the birds care not for me,
Except to sing a little farther off,
With looks that say, " What does this fel-
 low here ? "

The loud brook babbles only for the
 flowers :

The mountain and the forest take me not
Into their meditations ; I disturb
Their silence, as a child that drags his toy
Across a chapel's porch. The viewless
 ones

Who flattered me to claim their company

By gleams of thought they tossed to me
for alms,
About their grander matters turn, nor
deign
To notice me, unless it were to say —
As we put off a troublesome child —
“There, go !
Men are your fellows, go and mate with
them !”

If I could find one soul that would not
lie,
I would go back, and we would arm our
hands,
And strike at every ugly weed that stands
In God’s wide garden of the world, and
try,
Obedient to the Gardener’s commands,
To set some smallest flowers before we
die.

One such I had found, —
But she was bound,

Fettered and led, bid for and sold,
Chained to a stone by a ring of gold.

In a stony sense the stone loved her,
too :

Between our places the river was broad,
Should she tread on a broken heart to go
through —

Could she put a man's life in mid-stream
to be trod,

To come over dry-shod ?

Shame ! that a man with hand and
brain

Should, like a love-lorn girl, complain,
Rhyiming his dainty woes anew,
When there is honest work to do !

What work, what work ? Is God not
wise

To rule the world He could devise ?
Yet see thou, though the realm be His,

He governs it by deputies.
Enough to know of Chance and Luck,
The stroke we choose to strike is struck;
The deed we slight will slighted be,
In spite of all Necessity.
The Parcæ's web of good and ill
They weave with human shuttles still,
And fate is fate through man's free will.

With sullen thoughts that smoulder
hour by hour,
In vague expectancy of help or hope
Which still eludes my brain, waiting I sit
Like a blind beggar at a palace-gate,
Who hears the rustling past of silks, and
airs
Of costly odor mock him blowing by,
And feels within a dull and aching wish
That the proud wall would let some
coping down
To crush him dead, and let him have his
rest.

No help from men : they could not, if
they would.

And God? He lets His world be wrung
with pain.

No help at all then? Let life be in vain :
To get no help is surely greatest gain ;
To taunt the hunger down is sweetest
food.

O mocker, Memory ! From what float-
ing cloud,
Or from what witchery of the haunted
wood,
Or faintest perfumes, softly drifting
through
The lupines' lattice-bars of white and
blue,
Steals back upon my soul this weaker
mood?
My heart is dreaming ;—in a shadowy
room
I breathe the vague scent of a jasmín-
bloom

That floats on waves of music, softer
 played,
Till song and odor all the brain pervade ;
Swiftly across my cheek there sweeps the
 thrill
Of burning lips, — then all is hushed and
 still ;
And round the vision in unearthly awe
Deeps of enchanted starlight seem to
 draw,
In which my soul sinks, falling noise-
 lessly, —
As from a lone ship, far-off, in the night,
Out of a child's hand slips a pebble white,
Glimmering and fading down the awful
 sea.

That night, which pushed me out of
 Paradise,
When the last guest had taken his mask
 of smiles
And gone, she wheeled a sofa from the
 light

Where I sat touching the piano-keys,
And begged me play her weariness away.
I played all sweet and solemn airs I knew,
And when, with music mesmerized, she
 slept,
I made the deep chords tell her dreams
 my love.
Once, when they grew too passionate, I
 saw
The faint blush ripen in their glow, and
 chide,
Even in dreams, the rash, tumultuous
 thought.
Then when I made them say, "Sleep
 on, dream on,
For now we are together; when thou
 wak'st
Forevermore we are alone — alone,"
She sighed in sleep, and waked not: then
 I rose,
And softly stooped my head, and, half in
 awe,
Half passion-rapt, I kissed her lips fare-
 well.

— Only the meek-mouthed blossoms
kiss I now,
Or the cold cheek that sometimes comes
at night
In haunted dreams, and brushes past my
own.

Ah, what hast thou to do with me, sweet
song —

Why hauntest thou and vexest so my
dreams?

Have I not turned away from thee so
long —

So long, and yet the starry midnight
seems

Astir with tremulous music, as of old, —
Forbidden memories opening, fold on
fold?

O ghost of Love, why, with thy rose-leaf
lips,

Dost thou still mock my sleep with
kisses warm,

Torturing my dreams with touching finger-
tips,
That madden me to clasp thy phantom
form?
Have I not earned, by all these tears, at
last,
The right to rest untroubled by that Past?

Unto thy patient heart, my mother
Earth,
I come, a weary child.
I have no claim, save that thou gav'st me
birth,
And hast sustained me with thy nurture
mild.
I have stood up alone these many years ;
Now let me come and lie upon my face,
And spread my hands among the dewy
grass,
Till the slow wind's mesmeric touches pass
Above my brain, and all its throbbing
chase ;

Into thy bosom take these bitter tears,
And let them seem unto the innocent
 flowers
Only as dew, or heaven's gentle showers ;
Till, quieted and hushed against thy
 breast,
I can forget to weep,
And sink at last to sleep, —
Long sleep and rest.

Her face !

In a carriage on the street of the town,
Where I had strayed in walking from the
 bay,
Just as the sun was going down,
Shielding her sight from his latest ray,
She sat, and scanned with eager eye

The faces of the passers-by.
Whom was she looking for? Not me —
Yet what wild purpose can it be
That tempted her to this wild land?
— I marked that on her lifted hand
The diamonds no longer shine
Of the ring that meant, not mine — not
mine !

Ah fool — fool — fool! crawl back to
thy den,
Like a wounded beast as thou art, again ;
Whosever she be, not thine — not thine !

I sat last night on yonder ridge of rocks
To see the sun set over Tamelpais,
Whose tented peak, suffused with rosy
mist,
Blended the colors of the sea and sky
And made the mountain one great ame-
thyst
Hanging against the sunset.

In the west

There lay two clouds which parted com-
pany,
Floating like two soft-breasted swans, and
sailed
Farther and farther separate, till one
stayed
To make a mantle for the evening-star ;
The other wept itself away in rain.
A fancy seized me ; — if, in other worlds,
That Spirit from afar should call to me,
Across some starry chasm impassable,
Weeping, “ Oh, hadst thou only come to
me ! —
I loved you so ! — I prayed each night
that God
Would send you to me ! Now, alas ! too
late,
Too late — farewell ! ” and still again,
“ farewell ! ”
Like the pulsation of a silenced bell
Whose sobs beat on within the brain.

I rose,
And smote my staff strongly against the
ground,
And set my face homeward, and set my
heart
Firm in a passionate purpose: there, in
haste,
With that one echo goading me to speed,
“ If it should be too late — if it should be
Too late — too late ! ” I took a pen and
wrote :

“ Dear Soul, if I am mad to speak to
thee,
And this faint glimmer which I call a hope
Be but the corpse-light on the grave of
hope —
If thou, O darling Star, art in the West
To be my Evening-star, and watch my day
Fade slowly into desolate twilight, burn
This folly in the flames; and scattered
with
Its ashes, let my madness be forgot.

But if not so, oh be my Morning-star,
And crown my East with splendor : come
to me ! ”

A stern, wild, broken place for a man to
walk
And muse on broken fortunes ; a rare
place, —
There in the Autumn weather, cool and
still,
With the warm sunshine clinging round
the rocks
Softly, in pity, like a woman's love, —
To wait for some one who can never
come —
As a man there was waiting. Overhead
A happy bird sang quietly to himself,
Unconscious of such sombre thoughts
below,
To which the song was background : —

“ Yet how men
Sometimes will struggle, writhe, and
scream at death !

It were so easy now, in the mild air,
To close the senses, slowly sleep, and
die ;

To cease to be the shaped and definite
cloud,

And melt away into the fathomless
blue ; —

Only to touch this crimson thread of life,
Whose steady ripple pulses in my wrist,
And watch the little current soak the
grass,

Till the haze came, then darkness, and
then rest.

Would God be angry if I stopped one life
Among His myriads — such a worthless
one ?

If I should pray, I wonder would He send
An angel down out of that great, white
cloud,

(He surely could spare one from praising
Him,)

To tell if there is any better way
Than — Look ! Why, that is grand,
now ! (Am I mad ?

I did not think I should go mad!)
That 's grand —
One of the blessed spirits come like this
To meet a poor, lean man among the
rocks,
And answer questions for him ? ”

There she stood,
With blonde hair blowing back, as if the
breeze
Blew a light out of it, that ever played
And hovered at her shoulders. Such
blue eyes
Mirrored the dreamy mountain dis-
tances, —
(Yet, are the angels' faces thin and wan
Like that ; and do they have such
mouths, so drawn,
As if a sad song, some sad time, had died
Upon the lips, and left its echo there ?)

And the man rose, and stood with
folded hands

And head bent, and his downcast looks in
awe

Touching her garment's hem, that, when
she spoke,

Trembled a little where it met her feet.

“I am come, because you called to me
to come.

What were all other voices when I heard
The voice of my own soul's soul call to
me?

You knew I loved you — oh, you must
have known!

Was it a noble thing to do, you think,
To leave a lonely girl to die down there
In the great empty world, and come up
here

To make a martyr's pillar of your pride?
There has been nobler work done, there
in the world,

Than you have done this year!”

Then cried the man :

“O voice that I have prayed for — O sad
voice,
And woful eyes, spare me if I have
sinned!
There was a little ring you used to
wear” —

“O strange, wild Fates, that balance
bliss and woe
On such poor straws! It was a brother’s
gift.”

“You never told me” —

“Did you ever ask?”

“You, too, were surely prouder then
than now!”

“Dear, I am sadder now: the head
must bend
A little, when one’s weeping.”

Then the man, —
While half his mind, bewildered, at a
flash
Took in the wide, lone place, the singing
bird,
The sunshine streaming past them like a
wind,
And the broad tree that moved as though
it breathed :
“Oh, if 't is possible that in the world
There lies some low, mean work for me
to do,
Let me go there alone : I am ashamed
To wear life's crown when I flung down
its sword.
Crammed full of pride, and lust, and lit-
tleness,
O God, I am not worthy of thy gifts !
Let me find penance, till, years hence,
perchance,
Made pure by toil, and scourged with pain
and prayer ” —

Then a voice answered through His
creature's lips, —
“ God asks no penance but a better life.
He purifies by pain — He only ; 't is
A remedy too dangerous for our
Blind pharmacy. Lo ! we have tried that
way,
And borne what fruit, or blossoms even,
save one
Poor passion - flower ! Come, take thy
happiness ;
In happy hearts are all the sunbeams
forged
That brighten up our weatherbeaten
world.
Come back with me — Come ! for I love
you — Come ! ”

If it was not a dream : perchance it
was —
Often it seems so, and I wonder when
I shall awaken on the mountain-side,

With a little bitter taste left in the mouth
Of too much sleep, or too much happiness,
And sigh, and wish that I might dream
again.

STARLIGHT.



HEY think me daft, who nightly
meet
My face turned starward, while
my feet
Stumble along the unseen street ;

But should man's thoughts have only room
For Earth, his cradle and his tomb,
Not for his Temple's grander gloom ?

And must the prisoner all his days
Learn but his dungeon's narrow ways
And never through its grating gaze ?

Then let me linger in your sight,
My only amaranths ! blossoming bright
As over Eden's cloudless night.

The same vast belt, and square, and
crown,

That on the Deluge glittered down,
And lit the roofs of Bethlehem town !

Ye make me one with all my race,
A victor over time and space,
Till all the path of men I pace.

Far-speeding backward in my brain
We build the Pyramids again,
And Babel rises from the plain ;

And climbing upward on your beams
I peer within the Patriarchs' dreams,
Till the deep sky with angels teems.

My Comforters ! — Yea, why not mine ?
The power that kindled you doth shine,
In man, a mastery divine ;

That Love which throbs in every star,
And quickens all the worlds afar,
Beats warmer where his children are.

The shadow of the wings of Death
Broods over us ; we feel his breath :
“ Resurgam ” still the spirit saith.

These tired feet, this weary brain,
Blotted with many a mortal stain,
May crumble earthward — not in vain.

With swifter feet that shall not tire,
Eyes that shall fail not at your fire,
Nearer your splendors I aspire.

A DEAD BIRD IN WINTER.



THE cold, hard sky and hidden
sun,
The stiffened trees that shiver
so,
With bare twigs naked every one
To these harsh winds that freeze the
snow, —

It was a bitter place to die,
Poor birdie! Was it easier, then,
On such a world to shut thine eye,
And sleep away from life, than when

The apple-blossoms tint the air,
And, twittering in the sunny trees,
Thy fellow-songsters flit and pair,
Breasting the warm, caressing breeze?

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Nay, it were easiest, I feel,
 Though 't were a brighter Earth to
 lose,
To let the summer shadows steal
 About thee, bringing their repose ;

When the noon hush was on the air,
 And on the flowers the warm sun
 shined,
And Earth seemed all so sweet and fair,
 That He who made it must be kind.

So I, too, could not bear to go
 From Life in this unfriendly clime,
To lie beneath the crusted snow,
 When the dead grass stands stiff with
 rime ;

But under those blue skies of home,
 Far easier were it to lie down,
Where the perpetual violets bloom,
 And the rich moss grows never brown ;

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Where linnets never cease to build
Their nests, in boughs that always wave
To odorous airs, with blessing filled
From nestled blossoms round my grave.

SPRING TWILIGHT.



SINGING in the rain, robin ?

Rippling out so fast

All thy flute-like notes, as if

This singing were thy last !

After sundown, too, robin ?

Though the fields are dim,

And the trees grow dark and still,

Dripping from leaf and limb.

'T is heart-broken music —

That sweet, faltering strain, —

Like a mingled memory,

Half ecstasy, half pain.

Surely thus to sing, robin,

Thou must have in sight

Beautiful skies behind the shower,
And dawn beyond the night.

Would thy faith were mine, robin !
Then, though night were long,
All its silent hours should melt
Their sorrow into song.

EVENING.



THE Sun is gone : those glorious
chariot-wheels
Have sunk their broadening
spokes of flame, and left
Thin rosy films wimpled across the West,
Whose last faint tints melt slowly in the
blue,
As the last trembling cadence of a song
Fades into silence sweeter than all sound.

Now the first stars begin to tremble
forth
Like the first instruments of an orchestra
Touched softly, one by one. — There in
the East
Kindles the glory of moonrise : how its
waves

Break in a surf of silver on the clouds! —
White, motionless clouds, like soft and
snowy wings
Which the great Earth spreads, sailing
round the Sun.

O silent stars! that over ages past
Have shone serenely as ye shine to-night,
Unseal, unseal the secret that ye keep!
Is it not time to tell us why we live?
Through all these shadowy corridors of
years,
(Like some gray Priest, who through the
Mysteries
Led the blindfolded Neophyte in fear,
Time leads us blindly onward, till in
wrath
Tired Life would seize and throttle its
stern guide,
And force him tell us *whither* and *how*
long.
But Time gives back no answer — only
points

With motionless finger to eternity,
Which deepens over us, as that deep
sky

Darkens above me : only its vestibule
Glimmers with scattered stars ; and down
the West

A silent meteor slowly slides afar,
As though, pacing the garden-walks of
heaven,

Some musing seraph had let fall a flower.

EASTERN WINTER.



OLD — cold — the very sun looks
cold,
With those thin rays of chilly
gold
Laid on that gap of bluish sky
That glazes like a dying eye.

The naked trees are shivering,
Each cramped and bare branch quivering,
Cutting the bleak wind into blades,
Whose edge to brain and bone invades.

That hard ground seems to ache, all day,
Even for a sheet of snow, to lay
Upon its icy feet and knees,
Stretched stiffly there to freeze and freeze.

And yon shrunk mortal — what 's within
That nipped and winter-shriveled skin?
The pinched face drawn in peevish lines,
The voice that through his blue lips
whines, —

The frost has got within, you see, —
Left but a selfish *me* and *me* :
The heart is chilled, its nerves are numb,
And love has long been frozen dumb.

Ah, give me back the clime I know,
Where all the year geraniums blow,
And hyacinth-buds bloom white for snow ;

Where hearts beat warm with life's de-
light,
Through radiant winter's sunshine bright,
And summer's starry deeps of night ;

Where man may let earth's beauty thaw
The wintry creed which Calvin saw,
That God is only Power and Law ;

And out of Nature's bible prove,
That here below as there above
Our Maker — Father — God — is Love.

A PRAYER.



GOD, our Father, if we had but
truth !

Lost truth — which thou per-
chance

Didst let man lose, lest all his wayward
youth

He waste in song and dance ;
That he might gain, in searching, mightier
powers

For manlier use in those foreshadowed
hours.

If, blindly groping, he shall oft mistake,
And follow twinkling notes
Thinking them stars, and the one voice
forsake
Of Wisdom for the notes

Which mocking Beauty utters here and
there,

Thou surely wilt forgive him, and forbear !

Oh love us, for we love thee, Maker —
God !

And would creep near thy hand,
And call thee "Father, Father," from the
sod

Where by our graves we stand,
And pray to touch, fearless of scorn or
blame,

Thy garment's hem, which Truth and
Good we name.

THE POLAR SEA.



AT the North, far away,
Rolls a great sea for aye,
Silently, awfully.

Round it on every hand
Ice-towers majestic stand,
Guarding this silent sea
Grimly, invincibly.
Never there man hath been,
Who hath come back again,
Telling to ears of men
What is this sea within.
Under the starlight,
Rippling the moonlight,
Drinking the sunlight,
Desolate, never heard nor seen,
Beating forever it hath been.

From our life far away
Roll the dark waves, for aye,
Of an Eternity,
Silently, awfully.
Round it on every hand
Death's icy barriers stand,
Guarding this silent sea
Grimly, invincibly.
Never there man hath been
Who could return again,
Telling to mortal ken
What is within the sea
Of that Eternity.

Terrible is our life —
In its whole blood-written history
Only a feverish strife ;
In its beginning, a mystery —
In its wild ending, an agony.
Terrible is our death —
Black-hanging cloud over Life's setting
sun,
Darkness of night when the daylight is
done.

In the shadow of that cloud,
Deep within that darkness' shroud,
Rolls the ever-throbbing sea ;
And we — all we —
Are drifting rapidly
And floating silently
Into that unknown sea —
Into Eternity.

THE FUTURE.



WHAT may we take into the vast
Forever?
That marble door
Admits no fruit of all our long endeavor,
No fame-wreathed crown we wore,
No garnered lore.

What can we bear beyond the unknown
portal?
No gold, no gains
Of all our toiling: in the life immortal
No hoarded wealth remains,
Nor gilds, nor stains.

Naked from out that far abyss behind us
We entered here:
No word came with our coming, to re-
mind us

What wondrous world was near,
No hope, no fear.

Into the silent, starless Night before us,
Naked we glide :
No hand has mapped the constellations
o'er us,
No comrade at our side,
No chart, no guide.

Yet fearless toward that midnight, black
and hollow,
Our footsteps fare :
The beckoning of a Father's hand we fol-
low —
His love alone is there,
No curse, no care.

THE NORTH WIND.



ALL night, beneath the flashing
hosts of stars,

The North poured forth the pas-
sion of its soul

In mighty longings for the tawny South,
Sleeping afar among her orange-blooms.

All night, through the deep cañon's organ-
pipes,

Swept down the grand orchestral harmo-
nies

Tumultuous, till the hills' rock buttresses
Trembled in unison.

The sun has risen,
But still the storming sea of air beats on,
And o'er the broad green slopes a flood
of light

Comes streaming through the heavens
like a wind,
Till every leaf and twig becomes a lyre
And thrills with vibrant splendor.

Down the bay
The furrowed blue, save that 't is starred
with foam,
Is bare and empty as the sky of clouds ;
For all the little sails, that yesterday
Flocked past the islands, now have furled
their wings,
And huddle frightened at the wharves —
just as,
A moment since, a flock of twittering
birds
Whirled through the almond trees like
scattered leaves,
And hid beyond the hedge.

How the old oaks
Stand stiffly to it, and wrestle with the
storm !

While the tall eucalyptus' plummy tops
Tumble and toss and stream with quivering
 light.

Hark! when it lulls a moment at the ear,
The fir-trees sing their sea-song: — now
 again

The roar is all about us like a flood;
And like a flood the fierce light shines,
 and burns

Away all distance, till the far blue ridge,
That rims the ocean, rises close at hand,
And high, Prometheus-like, great Tamal-
 pais

Lifts proudly his grand front, and bears
 his scar,

Heaven's scath of wrath, defiant like a
 god.

I thank thee, glorious wind! Thou bring-
 est me

Something that breathes of mountain
 crag and pines,

Yea, more — from the unsullied, farthest
 North,

Where crashing icebergs jar like thunder-
shocks,
And midnight splendors wave and fade
and flame,
Thou bring'st a keen, fierce joy. So wilt
thou help
The soul to rise in strength, as some great
wave
Leaps forth, and shouts, and lifts the
ocean-foam,
And rides exultant round the shining
world.

CALIFORNIA WINTER.



HIS is not winter : where is the
crisp air,
And snow upon the roof, and
frozen ponds,
And the star-fire that tips the icicle ?

Here blooms the late rose, pale and
odorless ;
And the vague fragrance in the garden
walks
Is but a doubtful dream of mignonette.
In some smooth spot, under a sleeping
oak
That has not dreamed of such a thing as
spring,
The ground has stolen a kiss from the
cool sun

And thrilled a little, and the tender grass
Has sprung untimely, for these great
bright days,

Staring upon it, will not let it live.

The sky is blue, and 't is a goodly time,
And the round, barren hillsides tempt the
feet;

But 't is not winter: such as seems to
man

What June is to the roses, sending floods
Of life and color through the tingling
veins.

It is a land without a fireside. Far
Is the old home, where, even this very
night,

Roars the great chimney with its glorious
fire,

And old friends look into each other's
eyes

Quietly, for each knows the other's trust.

Heaven is not far away such winter
nights:

The big white stars are sparkling in the
east,
And glitter in the gaze of solemn eyes ;
For many things have faded with the flow-
ers,
And many things their resurrection wait ;
Earth like a sepulchre is sealed with
frost,
And Morn and Even beside the silent
door
Sit watching, and their soft and folded
wings
Are white with feathery snow.

Yet even here
We are not quite forgotten by the Hours,
Could human eyes but see the beautiful
Save through the glamour of a memory.
Soon comes the strong south wind, and
shouts aloud
Its jubilant anthem. Soon the singing
rain
Comes from warm seas, and in its skyey
tent

Enwraps the drowsy world. And when,
 some night,
Its flowing folds invisibly withdraw,
Lo ! the new life in all created things.
The azure mountains and the ocean gates
Against the lovely sky stand clean and
 clear
As a new purpose in the wiser soul.

THE LOVER'S SONG.



LEND me thy fillet, Love !
I would no longer see ;
Cover mine eyelids close awhile,
And make me blind like thee.

Then might I pass her sunny face,
And know not it was fair ;
Then might I hear her voice, nor guess
Her starry eyes were there.

Ah ! banished so from stars and sun —
Why need it be my fate ?
If only she might dream me good
And wise, and be my mate !

Lend her thy fillet, Love !
Let her no longer see :
If there is hope for me at all,
She must be blind like thee.

A TROPICAL MORNING AT SEA.



SKY in its lucent splendor lifted
Higher than cloud can be ;
Air with no breath of earth to
stain it,
Pure on the perfect sea.

Crests that touch and tilt each other,
Jostling as they comb ;
Delicate crash of tinkling water,
Broken in pearly foam.

Plashings — or is it the pinewood's whis-
pers,
Babble of brooks unseen,
Laughter of winds when they find the
blossoms,
Brushing aside the green ?

A Tropical Morning at Sea, 181

Waves that dip, and dash, and sparkle ;
Foam-wreaths slipping by,
Soft as a snow of broken roses
Afloat over mirrored sky.

Off to the East the steady sun-track
Golden meshes fill —
Webs of fire, that lace and tangle,
Never a moment still.

Liquid palms but clap together,
Fountains, flower-like, grow —
Limpid bells on stems of silver —
Out of a slope of snow.

Sea-depths, blue as the blue of violets —
Blue as a summer sky,
When you blink at its arch sprung over
Where in the grass you lie.

Dimly an orange bit of rainbow
Burns where the low west clears,
Broken in air, like a passionate promise
Born of a moment's tears.

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Thinned to amber, rimmed with silver,
Clouds in the distance dwell,
Clouds that are cool, for all their color,
Pure as a rose-lipped shell.

Fleets of wool in the upper heavens
Gossamer wings unfurl ;
Sailing so high they seem but sleeping
Over yon bar of pearl.

What would the great world lose, I wonder —

Would it be missed or no —
If we stayed in the opal morning,
Floating forever so ?

Swung to sleep by the swaying water,
Only to dream all day —
Blow, salt wind from the north upstarting,
Scatter such dreams away !

A FOOLISH WISH.



WHY need I seek some burden
small to bear
Before I go?

Will not a host of nobler souls be here,
Heaven's will to do?
Of stronger hands, unfailing, unafraid?
O silly soul! what matters my small aid
Before I go!

I tried to find, that I might show to them,
Before I go,
The path of purer lives: the light was
dim, —
I do not know
If I had found some footprints of the way;
It is too late their wandering feet to stay,
Before I go.

I would have sung the rest some song of
cheer,

Before I go ;

But still the chords rang false ; some jar
of fear

Some jangling woe.

And at the end I cannot weave one
chord

To float into their hearts my last warm
word,

Before I go.

I would be satisfied if I might tell,

Before I go,

That one warm word, — how I have loved
them well,

Could they but know !

And would have gained for them some
gleam of good ;

Have sought it long ; still seek, — if but
I could !

Before I go.

'T is a child's longing, on the beach at
play :

“ Before I go,”

He begs the beckoning mother, “ Let me
stay

One shell to throw ! ”

'T is coming night ; the great sea climbs
the shore, —

“ Ah, let me toss one little pebble more,
Before I go ! ”

EVERY-DAY LIFE.



HE marble-smith, at his morning
task
Merrily glasses the blue-veined
stone,
With stout hands circling smooth. You
ask,
“What will it be, when it is done?”

“A shaft for a young girl’s grave.” Both
hands
Go back with a will to their sinewy
play ;
And he sings like a bird, as he swaying
stands,
A rollicking stave of Love and May.

BEFORE SUNRISE IN WINTER.



PURPLE cloud hangs half-way
down ;
Sky, yellow gold below ;
The naked trees, beyond the town,
Like masts against it show —

Bare masts and spars of our earth-ship,
With shining snow-sails furled ;
And through the sea of space we slip,
That flows all round the world.

SIBYLLINE BARTERING.



FATE, the gray Sibyl, with kind
eyes above
Closely locked lips, brought
youth a merry crew
Of proffered friends ; the price, self-slaying
love.

Proud youth repulsed them. She and
they withdrew.

Then she brought half the troop ; the cost,
the same.

My man's heart wavered : should I take
the few,
And pay the whole ? But while I went
and came,
Fate had decided. She and they with-
drew.

Once more she came, with two. Now life's
midday

Left fewer hours before me. Lonelier
grew

The house and heart. But should the late
purse pay

The earlier price? And she and they
withdrew.

At last I saw Age his forerunners send.

Then came the Sibyl, still with kindly
eyes

And close-locked lips, and offered me one
friend, —

Thee, my one darling! With what
tears and cries

I claimed and claim thee; ready now to
pay

The perfect love that leaves no self to
slay!

NOTICES OF POEMS

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